

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05 CEA-01 COME-00 EB-08 FRB-03
STR-07 TRSE-00 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 SSC-01 DLOS-09
OES-07 /128 W

-----089591 181917Z /43

R 171845Z FEB 78
FM MEMBASSY MADRID
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0000
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
AMEMBASSY RABAT
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L MADRID 01788

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, SS, AG, MO, SP
SUBJECT: CONGRESS VOTES RATIFICATION OF MOROCCO FISHING
AGREEMENT

REF: MADRID 1613 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: THE SPANISH CONGRESS OF DEPUTIES (LOWER HOUSE) VOTED RATIFICATION OF THE CONTROVERSIAL FISHING AGREEMENT WITH MOROCCO BY A MARGIN OF 174-142 FEBRUARY 15. THE VOTE FOLLOWED A HARD-HITTING DEBATE, AND WHILE THE OPPOSITION SOCIALIST PSOE WAS THE CLEAR LOSER OF THE BATTLE, THE UNDERLYING WAR -- SPANISH POLICY ON ITS FORMER SAHARAN TERRITORY -- IS CERTAIN TO CONTINUE. LIKELY TO MARK THE NEXT ROUND ARE THE REACTIONS OF ALGERIA AND THE POLISARIO: WHILE THE FORMER HAS KEPT ITS CARDS CLOSE TO ITS CHEST, THE LATTER HAD EARLIER PROCLAIMED THAT RATIFICATION WOULD BE CONSIDERED TANTAMOUNT TO A "DECLARATION OF

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WAR." END SUMMARY.

2. NO BREAK-OUT OF THE VOTE WAS AVAILABLE, BUT IT SEEMED CLEAR THE GOVERNMENT UCD (WHICH HAS A TOTAL OF 165 SEATS) HAD STOOD FIRM, ACQUIRING THE EXTRA MARGIN FROM THE SPLINTER SOCIALIST PSP AND (PROBABLY) THE CONSERVATIVE ALIANZA POPULAR. IT WAS WIDELY AGREED AMONG OBSERVERS

THE FOLLOWING DAY THAT THE PSOE, WHICH HAD EARLIER PROMISED TO SUPPORT ITS ALLEGATIONS OF CORRUPTION IN BACK OF THE AGREEMENT, FAILED TO MAKE GOOD. MANY CAME DOWN HARD ON THE PSOE'S RESORT TO AD HOMINEM ARGUMENTS AND FAILURE TO UNDERSTAND THE REALITIES OF INTERNATIONAL FISHING, AND SOME EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT THE POSSIBLE EFFECT ON THE GENERAL LEVEL OF POLITICAL DEBATE.

3. IN LARGE PART, OF COURSE, THE PSOE WAS LESS CONCERNED WITH FISHING THAN WITH THE POLICY ISSUE -- SPAIN AND THE SAHARA -- UNDERLYING THE RATIFICATION DEBATE. FOR ALL OF THE PSOE CHARGES THAT THE AGREEMENT WAS HARMFUL TO THE LITTLE GUY IN SPAIN'S FISHING SECTOR (CHARGES WHICH THE UCD CONTESTED SHARPLY AND WITH FIGURES), AND FOR ALL THAT THE PSOE TOOK THE OCCASION TO KEEP ALIVE THE THEME OF CORRUPTION IN THE REGIME-RELATED PAST OF MANY PROMINENT UCD FIGURES, ITS LARGER FOCUS WAS ON THE SAHARA, WHICH IT HAS GIVEN MORE NOTICEABLE ATTENTION THAN ANY OTHER INTERNATIONAL ISSUE. IN THIS SENSE, RATIFICATION WILL SETTLE ALMOST NOTHING, FOR THERE IS NO PROSPECT THE PSOE WILL ABANDON ITS PRO-POLISARIO EFFORT.

4. FOREIGN MINISTER OREJA IN COMMENTING TO THE AMBASSADOR FEBRUARY 16 ON THE DEBATE EXPRESSED CONSIDERABLE CONCERN OVER THE TENOR OF THE DEBATE AND THE ATTITUDE OF THE PSOE. HE THOUGHT THE UCD HAD COME OUT WELL, BUT HE SAID HE HAD CONFIDENTIAL

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TOLD THE PRIME MINISTER THAT IN HIS VIEW THE DAY IN CONGRESS HAD BEEN "BAD FOR PARLIAMENT AND BAD FOR DEMOCRACY." HE NOTED THAT THE PRESS HAD BEEN UNANIMOUSLY CRITICAL OF THE PSOE'S CONDUCT. OTHER UCD SOURCES HAVE COMMENTED TO US THAT THEY BELIEVE PSOE TACTICS WERE CALCULATED TO WIN POPULAR APPROVAL OF SOCIALIST CHAMPIONSHIP AGAINST VESTED INTERESTS. STABLER

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